

Goal 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Seeing the Forest for the Trees—Making the Most of Synergies to Achieve SDGs in a Constrained Environment
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The proposed 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) are the result of extensive negotiations undertaken by United Nations Member States in order to agree on the world we want by 2030. The 17 goals span a number of economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Achieving these goals will require an unprecedented level of cooperation necessary to leverage available financing and knowledge resources as well as implementation modalities. An integrated, interdisciplinary approach within and across goals is required.

A case in point is SDG 15 which aims to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”. It is accompanied by 10 targets, which include integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, and poverty reduction strategies and accounts, and a target to mobilize and significantly increase from all sources financial resources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems.

Tackling deforestation, land degradation, desertification and the protection of biodiversity cannot be treated in isolation: healthy ecosystems are the bedrock of poverty reduction efforts, resilient and productive farming, and water systems that underpin development and

growth. Many agriculture, health and water experts are aware that deforestation and suboptimal land use could seriously impair plans to ensure healthy lives (SDG 3), end hunger (SDG 2) and supply water (SDG 6). If narrow sectoral approaches remain the norm, and negative spillover effects remain unchecked, the space for long-term development will become increasingly constrained. Intersectoral approaches, on the other hand, can help deliver on multiple goals in a more far-sighted and effective manner.

Governments will be committing to meet the SDGs at a time when resources around the globe are already severely depleted, threatening their ability to deliver on social and economic opportunities. It is estimated that close to 50 per cent of all jobs worldwide are linked to agriculture, fisheries and forests. Three quarters of the world's 115 top crops depend on animal pollination, and more than 50 per cent of all medications are based on medicinal plants, yet animal and plant biodiversity is receding fast in the wake of deforestation and forest fragmentation. About 1 billion people rely on fish as their primary source of animal protein, yet major fish stocks are in decline. Mangroves are being lost at the alarming rate of 2 to 7 per cent annually, and with them key habitats for fisheries and storm protection.

In this context, the post-2015 agenda also has significant implications for the World Bank Group. Its goals of ending extreme poverty by 2030 and boosting shared prosperity for the bottom 40 per cent of the population in a sustainable manner are well aligned with the SDGs. Because SDG 15 proposes to protect, restore and enhance natural ecosystems, it is central to the Bank's work in rural areas where 78 per cent of the world's extreme poor still live, and to the long-term economic growth prospects on behalf of future generations. It

proposes no less than to safeguard the planet for tomorrow.

Results from local reforestation efforts to full-fledged green growth strategies show that win-wins are possible and within reach. For example, the experience of the Republic of Korea following the 2008 financial crisis demonstrated that it is possible to both boost jobs and gross domestic product (GDP), while also reducing pollution and carbon emissions. This was achieved by shifting from carbon-intensive industries to innovative low-carbon technologies.

Simple interventions, such as better managing livestock to allow natural regeneration of plants and trees, have allowed rural communities under stress to rebound, increase their yields and enjoy better standards of living, everywhere from Albania to Colombia, China and Ethiopia. Sharing these experiences from one country to another will be crucial to ensure that nations do not start from scratch and that they help each other deliver on their ambitious vision.

Climate finance funds have been instrumental in efforts to deliver solutions that target multiple sectors. Financing from the BioCarbon Fund, the Forest Investment Program and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, for example, have been used to pilot policy changes in agriculture and livestock management to combat deforestation and sequester more carbon. Managed together, these forest funds will provide a seamless line of support for our client countries. Building public-private partnerships (PPPs) with large multinational companies to support deforestation-free supply chains for key commodities, such as palm oil, soy, beef, and others, is also part of the overall approach. Such PPPs offer immense opportunities to scale up investments and technical support to farmers in far greater sums than public investments alone can otherwise achieve.

Finally, natural capital accounting approaches encourage Governments

and businesses to take into consideration the state and sustainability of their natural assets in their planning. Initiatives such as the Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services partnership and other programmes are helping a growing number of countries see beyond GDP and integrate “ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts” (target 15.9). Natural capital accounting can help countries focus on a dashboard of indicators to monitor the assets countries need for long-term growth and ensure that progress on one SDG does not come at the expense of another. A lot more could be done on this front. Data gaps and remedies are sure to figure prominently in the months ahead as the United Nations gets ready to share an indicative road-map of indicators for consultation.

With the imminent launch of the SDGs agenda, the World Bank Group is actively preparing to support its implementation by helping countries identify and prioritize actions that reinforce virtuous links between healthy ecosystems and development. Interventions in forests, rural landscapes and oceans must meet a multitude of country needs, from economic growth, to nutrition and food security, and climate change objectives. Investments in jobs, competitiveness, and clean air and water also build resilience and reduce emissions. We stand ready to work alongside partners in advancing integrated, multisectoral solutions that will be imperative for achieving SDG 15—and indeed all the SDGs—in an increasingly interconnected, constrained and committed world.

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